

WYCOMBE'S GREAT ESCAPE

IN a miraculous escape, reminiscent of Houdini at his dramatic best, Wycombe Wanderers came back from the dead to snatch a draw with Hayes in Tuesday night's F.A. Trophy third round match at a disbelieving Church Road.

With just six minutes of ordinary time remaining, Wanderers, to intents and purposes, were out of the competition. Thanks to a series of near misses and two defensive blunders of their own, they trailed hopelessly 2-0 to a side ten places below them in the league table.

But then it happened. Blues were awarded a penalty after handball on the line and skipper Howard Kennedy pulled back a goal from the spot. Two minutes later the large Wycombe contingent were ecstatic as Long lunged forward to head home from Kennedy's free-kick.

In those dramatic final moments, which included four minutes of additional injury time, the Blues could well have snatched an incredible victory, but Stewart Atkins fired over from close range with the goal at his mercy.

But Wycombe fans were not going to grumble about that miss. That really would have been too good to be true.

Instead the teams' now replay at Loakes Park on Monday and Wycombe must start firm favourites. Disappointed Hayes won't easily put out of their minds the fact that they led by two goals with time running out.

Some Hayes fans were already discussing the best way to get to the next round opponents Run-corn, when Wanderers put an end to all their plans.

On reflection a draw was a fair result, but Blues would have had only themselves to blame if they had gone out. Their game was riddled with errors and against better teams than Hayes would have been even more severely punished.

Wycombe received a blow before the match when John Maskell announced he would not be fit after injuring a leg in last Saturday's win against Dulwich. This brought Peter Spittle into goal and I am afraid he does not inspire confidence with the fans nor sometimes with his own teammates.

STRONG WIND

It was partially his error that enabled Hayes, playing with a strong wind out their, to take the lead after 18 minutes. It was his failure to go up for an inswinging corner that allowed the bulky Gary Gilbert to head home. Indeed Gilbert was one of three Hayes players lining up to nod it home and so there must be a question mark against the whole Wycombe defence.

This was identical to the Slough's equaliser in last week's Berks and Bucks tie, when Spittle was once again the goalkeeper.

Wycombe seemed extremely uneasy at this stage. The defence was having all sorts of problems coping with the speed of Ron Nelson, while former Football League player Pat Morrissey dictated the course of the match from the midfield.

It was in attempt to halt Morrissey's authority that Paul

Birdseye received a very rare booking for a late tackle in the 20th minute. This was a symptom of Wycombe's growing frustration.

When Blues did attack they found goalkeeper Allan Jarrett in his most agile mood and they never really looked like equalising before the break. Indeed Hayes should have increased their lead following another inswinging corner but Laurie Craker and the corpulent Gary Gilbert both had efforts cleared off the line in a mad scramble.

For the last 10 minutes of the first half Wycombe at last began to string a few passes together. They looked a completely different side. With the wind at their backs after the interval Wycombe looked as though they would tear their opponents apart.

A goal then and Blues would have cruised to quite a comfortable victory — and they had three good chances to equalise.

Long saw one shot saved off the line and another go inches wide, while the best of the lot fell to Atkins who headed over from five yards out.

But the longer the half went on, the less likely it looked that they would score. Hayes recovered their pose and seemed assured of a place in the last eight.

So it was against background of desperation that Andy Williams brought on Dylan Evans for the limping Keith Mead in the 76th minute. At the same time Hayes substituted Dave Hatton for the struggling Gilbert.

SENSELESS

Two minutes later Evans and Hatton were to feature in one of the most senseless penalty incidents it has been my misfortune to witness.

When coming on as sub, Evans is always keen to get into the ac-

tion, in some way or other, but this time unfortunately, he chose to do it inside his team's own penalty area.

With Hatton in possession but not threatening, Evans barged clumsily into him under the nose of the referee, who had no option but to award a penalty which Morrissey put away — apparently to secure Hayes' place in the next round.

Had the match ended then, Evans could well have been lynched by his own supporters. But six minutes later he atoned by getting into a dangerous position and shooting for goal. The effort beat Jarrett and was stopped on the line by Morrissey's hand.

Kennedy cut his margins a bit fine but scoring after striking the left hand post, but it was enough to stir Wycombe to a tremendous late rally which brought that other goal by Long and scenes of complete disbelief, and utter relief.

HAYES: A. Jarrett, A. Carrington, V. Akers, L. Craker, G. Bartlett, M. McGovern, P. Morrissey, R. Wiles, R. Nelson, A. Tottman, G. Gilbert (sub: D. Hatton 76 mins).

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, S. Hardwick, R. Davies, K. Mead (sub: D. Evans 76 mins), A. Phillips, P. Birdseye, S. Atkins, M. Holifield, S. Long, H. Kennedy, T. Scott.

Referee: L. A. Bartels (Westcliffe-on-Sea).

Half-time 1-0. **Scorers:** Hayes-Gilbert (18 mins), Morrissey (pen 78 mins); Wycombe-Kennedy (pen 84 mins), Long (86 mins).

Back to League

WYCOMBE return to more mundane matters tomorrow when they entertain Woking in the Berger Isthmian League. But it will give Blues a chance to consolidate on their gradually improving league position.

At the start of the season Woking were the team to beat. They stood high in the table and reached the second round of the F.A. Cup for the first time in their history. There they met Division Three side Swansea who after being held to a 2-2 draw at Vetch Field won the replay 5-3 after extra time.

Things have not been the same for Woking since that defeat. They were bundled out of both the Trophy and London Senior Cup and their league position slipped alarmingly. They now stand ninth.

But they still have in Alan Morton, Steve Cosham and Eggie James one of the most dangerous attacks in the league.

BERGER ISTHMIAN LEAGUE PREMIER DIVISION (Up to March 6)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slough	31	16	7	8	44	32	55
Enfield	26	16	4	6	48	27	52
Dulwich	28	14	9	5	48	24	51
Barking	25	14	6	3	55	35	50
Hendon	32	13	11	8	42	36	50
Dagenham	26	15	4	7	50	38	49
Wycombe	28	13	7	8	40	26	46
Leathhead	27	13	5	9	42	27	44
Woking	27	12	7	8	53	39	43
Croydon	26	12	6	8	36	26	42
Tooting	30	11	8	11	40	39	41
Hitchin	32	11	8	13	47	54	41
Boreham Wd	32	11	8	13	41	49	41
Oxford	31	11	6	14	38	54	39
Sutton	30	10	8	12	41	36	38
Walthamstow	29	11	5	13	45	47	38
Tilbury	31	10	7	14	44	61	37
Carshalton	29	7	10	12	37	49	31
Hayes	30	6	11	13	31	44	29
Staines	28	5	11	12	30	44	26
Kingston	32	3	11	18	25	51	20
Ley stone	28	2	5	21	20	59	11



Hayes goalkeeper Allan Jarrett races quickly off his line to thwart Stewart Atkins